

O. I o s e l i a n i



Bacho and Gocho



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When Bacho the Hunter took his very first steps the earth trembled and shook. All the beasts in the forest were frightened. Even the Great Lion's heart skipped a beat.

Everyone in the land where tigers roam liked Bacho for his kind heart. What Bacho liked best was Big Tigress' milk, for it was the sweetest of all.

All this happened long ago, when Bacho was still a very small boy. Now that he is bigger, nearly as big as you, he loves to listen to stories in the evenings. He'll never go to sleep if his sister Mano or his brother Ramazi forget to tell him a bedtime story. That is why they both take turns at story-telling. The stories Bacho likes best are the ones about Bacho the Hunter. This is one of them.





ONE day Bacho's mother was out. However, Ramazi and Mano were both at home. It's nice when your brother doesn't have to go anywhere. It's still better when your sister is also at home. Still, when Mother is away you can never really be happy, not even if the lions are afraid of you. Not even if you can catch a live tigress and her cubs are your foster brothers. No, you can never really be happy without your mother.

Imagine if she is away in the daytime. Then imagine what things are like if she has to go away in the evening!

That is why Mano and Ramazi took to telling Bacho stories.

One evening, when the fireflies came winging into the yard, Mano said to Ramazi, "It's your turn to tell Bacho a story today."

"I can't. I'm busy drawing a picture for school."

"But he can't stay up because of your picture!"

"He can go to sleep without a story for once."

"No, I can't!"

"Then don't!"

"I won't!" Bacho said in a huff.

"All right, Bacho. I'll tell you a story. Once upon a time there was a boy."

"Me!"

"Don't interrupt. Once upon a time there was a boy named Bacho. There was another boy who lived next door, and that boy's name was Gocha."

"Gocha was fat!"

"Don't interrupt or I won't tell you any more."

Bacho decided to be still, because he knew Ramazi meant it.

"Gocha would crumble some bread into a bowl and pour milk over it. He would eat the bread and milk and then gobble up a big roll and butter. Then he would poke about in the kitchen. If he found some pancakes he would eat them up, too."

"You'll probably grow up to be weak and fat, Gocha," Bacho said to him one day.

Gocha smiled, because he was never cross, and said, "No, I won't. I'll be strong when I grow up, and I'll go hunting with you."

"You'll get hungry in the woods, and you'll start to bawl. You can't go hunting."

"I know I'll get hungry, but I won't mind, because I'm fat. If we don't have enough food I'll let you have my share."

"I don't want your share. I'll roast myself a piece of meat if I'm hungry. Don't you know how much we hunters eat in the forest?"

"Then maybe I'll be of use to you. I'll be very strong, and I'll help you."

"I have a big brother and a sister, and cousins, and they always help me if I need them."

"Well then, I'll help someone who doesn't have a brother or cousins." Gocha was offended, but he didn't know how to be cross and so he kept on smiling.





ONE day a parrot flew in from the land where tigers roam, bringing Bacho the terrible news that his foster brothers, the tiger cubs, were missing. No one knew what had happened to them, nor even whether they were still alive. Their mother, Tigress, was sick with worry and grief. She lay under a tree moaning and asked the parrot to find Bacho. "He remembers me and my cubs. I know he'll come to the rescue."

Gocha went over to the fence and saw the bright bird in Bacho's yard. He heard its sad tale.

"I'll ask Bacho to let me go with him. No, he won't take me anyway. I know! I'll follow him. Tracking down tigers is a tricky job. You never can tell what might happen."

And so, when Bacho set out, Gocha followed along quietly behind.

Bacho kept on going until he finally reached the land where tigers roam.

He saw Big Tigress. She was so thin from grief she looked just like a bag of bones.

"Don't worry, Tigress," Bacho said. "Everyone still remembers me here. I'm sure I'll find your cubs and bring them back."

Gocha knew he was very fat, and so he hid behind the biggest tree. No one saw him, but he could see and hear everything that was going on.

Bacho sent for the great hunters of the land. They came from near and far and all were very pleased to see him. "You've forgotten us, Bacho," they said.

Bacho frowned. "Did any one of you kill my foster brothers, the tiger cubs?" he demanded.

"No! No! We could never do such a thing. We all like you so much."

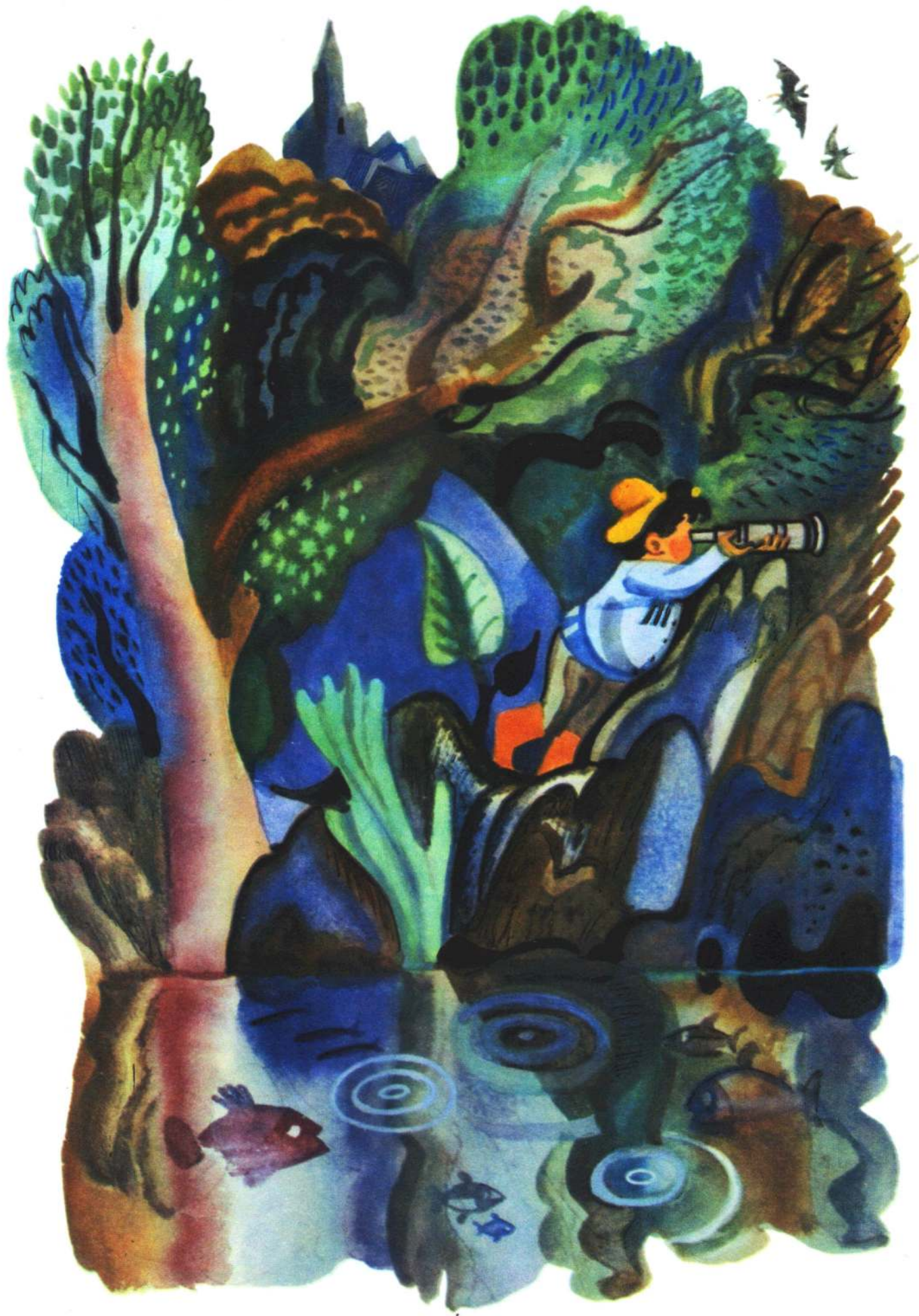
"All right. I believe you. I've no time to talk now I have to find my brothers."

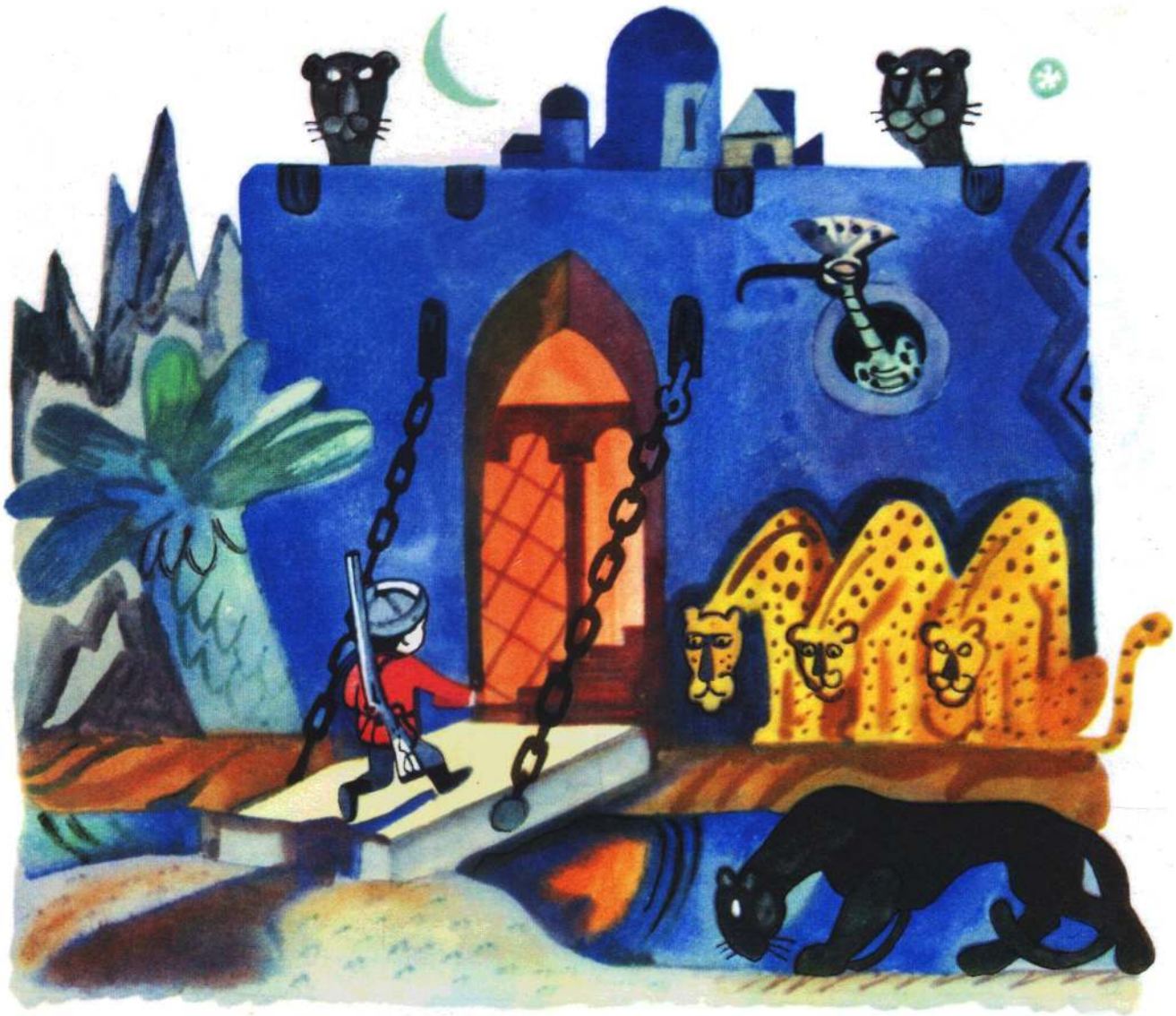
The great hunters wanted Bacho to be their guest at a fine feast, but when they saw how sad he was they did not even dare mention it.

As Bacho walked through the forest he said to himself, "I'll go to see









Lion, the King of the Beasts. If anyone knows what's going on in the animal kingdom he does."

Gocha followed him, always keeping out of sight. Naturally, he hid behind the biggest tree.

When Bacho approached the palace the guards recognised him. They saw that the famous hunter was frowning and thought he might have come to punish them for their mischief. The guards threw open all the gates and doors and bowed him in, saying, "Welcome, Great Hunter! We know you have come to see the King."

Bacho entered the throne room.

King Lion had grown old and deaf, and his eyesight was very poor. But he was the king and until he was dethroned he would never give up his crown. There were some pictures of Bacho on the wall which had been cut out of a magazine. There were also several "Young Bacho the Hunter" books on a shelf so that King Lion had no trouble recognising the famous hunter.

When Lion saw that Bacho was frowning he roared pitifully, "I'm innocent! I swear I'm not guilty of anything. I bow to your picture before going to bed every night. I'll bow to it every morning, too, from now on. What else do you expect of poor old me?"







Then Bacho said, "I don't want you to bow to my picture, but I do want you to tell me whether you've had any news of my foster brothers."

However, the old lion kept mumbling, "Considering that I'm a lion, I'm really very kind. Besides, since I learned about you, I've lost my appetite completely. I never eat more than half a portion any more. If you want me to, I'll eat even less. I swear I will. Poor me, I've become very hard of hearing."

"Have you had any news of the tiger cubs?" Bacho shouted right next to his ear.

At this King Lion decided that Bacho was angry at him for some reason or other. He fell to the ground and began licking Bacho's boots, mumbling, "From now on I'll bow to your picture three times a day."

Bacho was disgusted. "What's the use of talking to him?" he said to himself. "He's stone deaf, even though he is the King of the Beasts."

One of the courtiers, a cheetah, approached timidly and said, "Your foster brothers had a feud with the wild pigs. They may have got into trouble."





"A pig is always a pig," Bacho said to himself. "You can expect anything from a pig." He hurried off to search for the cubs.

Gocha was waiting for him. He had been hiding behind a big tree and now ran off, following Bacho.

Bacho made his way through the jungle. It was hard work. Gocha plugged on behind. In some places the trees grew so closely together



that fat Gocha couldn't squeeze between them and had to circle round instead.

When the jungle ended Bacho came out upon shifting sands. There was not a single tree, not even a blade of grass, in sight.

"There must be a sea or a big river nearby. That's why there's so much sand here," he decided.

Gocha came out of the jungle, too, and heaved a sigh of relief, for he would not have to run round any trees in the desert. Then he bent over to keep out of sight and headed after Bacho.

Bacho trudged on and on. There were no animals in sight and no birds. The famous hunter had never been in such a place before. "I'll surely come upon someone sooner or later," he said to keep up his spirits.

He was getting weaker and weaker. Bacho wanted to sit down and rest, but the sun beat down fiercely, and there was not a bit of shade anywhere. He was very thirsty, but there was no water. He was very hungry, but there was nothing but sand all around.

"How can I go back to Tigress empty-handed? Besides, I'll never reach the forest if I don't have any food or water."

So Bacho trudged on again. His throat was parched and his insides were empty.









There was no end to the sand. Well, that was a desert for you, nothing but sand.

Suddenly Bacho came upon a four-legged animal that was nibbling thistles. The famous hunter was so happy to see a living creature. When he got closer he saw it was a camel and laughed excitedly. "My dear old floppy-lips!" he cried.

"I'm the most handsome creature hereabouts," Camel replied with a twinkle in its eye.

"Tell me what to do. I'm dying of thirst."

"I really don't know what to suggest," Camel said and shook his head. "I'm thirsty, too. I'll have to go looking for water. Perhaps I'll be able to hold out for another week without a drink."

"There are mountain springs every place where I come from," Bacho said and licked his dry lips.

"I'm quite happy living here," Camel replied. "I'm not afraid of anyone here. Well, I'm going off to find some water. I'll be back soon."

"You have a good life here."

"I do. I never meet a soul unless someone comes along who's lost his way."

Yesterday a herd of wild pigs surrounded two young tigers. I nearly

died of fright. But the tigers were so weak from hunger and thirst they could hardly move. They didn't even look my way."

"Those are my friends!" Bacho cried and was off. He ran on and on until he came to where the tiger cubs lay on the sand. But they were no longer cubs, they were grown tigers by then. They lay there, barely breathing, never moving a muscle.

The tigers were twins and were as alike as peas in a pod, the only difference being that one had blue eyebrows and the other had green eyelashes.

Bacho picked up Bluebrow, but was too weak to lift Greenlash. What was he to do? He couldn't rescue one brother and leave the other to die. Finally, he set off with Bluebrow. It was very hard going. After a while he was so tired he lowered the tiger to the ground. Then he went back and







picked up Greenlash. "If I keep going back and forth like this," he said to himself as he carried the second tiger, we'll never get out of the desert. I'll collapse, just like they did."

When Bacho finally reached the spot where he had left Bluebrow he saw that the tiger was gone. It is hard to mark a place in the desert, so he couldn't really be sure whether this was where he had left Bluebrow. The only thing for him to do was to keep on going.

Bacho set off again. After a while he noticed a tiger far ahead of him.



“I have to reach him,” he said, but he couldn’t manage to catch up with it, for someone was carrying the tiger. Who could it be? “Who is that strong?” Bacho wondered. He tried his best to walk faster, but it was no use. “Just you wait! I’ll catch up with you!” he muttered angrily. He forgot all about being hungry and thirsty. He shifted Greenlash to his other shoulder and set off at a trot. When he felt he was ready to drop he saw that they had reached the edge of the forest. “That means there’s water nearby!”





Indeed. There was Bluebrow, lying in the grass by a spring, drinking. Bacho came up to him and lowered Greenlash to the ground. Then he bent over to drink himself. After the tigers had had their fill they felt better.

"Who brought you here?" Bacho asked Bluebrow.

"I don't know. I thought you did," Bluebrow rumbled.

"Bacho brought me here, not you. I was too weak to speak, but I remember everything clearly," Greenlash mumbled.

Bacho looked around in wonder. Since there were no big trees at the edge of the woods, he spotted Gocha right away. Gocha was hiding behind a small tree.

"Come on out, Gocha! Don't hide! I can see you anyway!"

Gocha walked round the tree. He was smiling.

"Why don't you have some water, Gocha? Aren't you thirsty?"

"Sure, I am. But I can wait," Gocha replied.

"See how much water there is. You don't have to wait any longer."

"Who's that fat boy?" Bluebrow wanted to know.

"He's my neighbour," Bacho said. "He's fat because he loves to eat. But he crossed the desert and carried you here. See him standing by the spring and not drinking?"

“What a fine boy he is,” the tigers agreed. “We would have died in the desert if not for you. It was hard on you, wasn’t it, Bacho?”

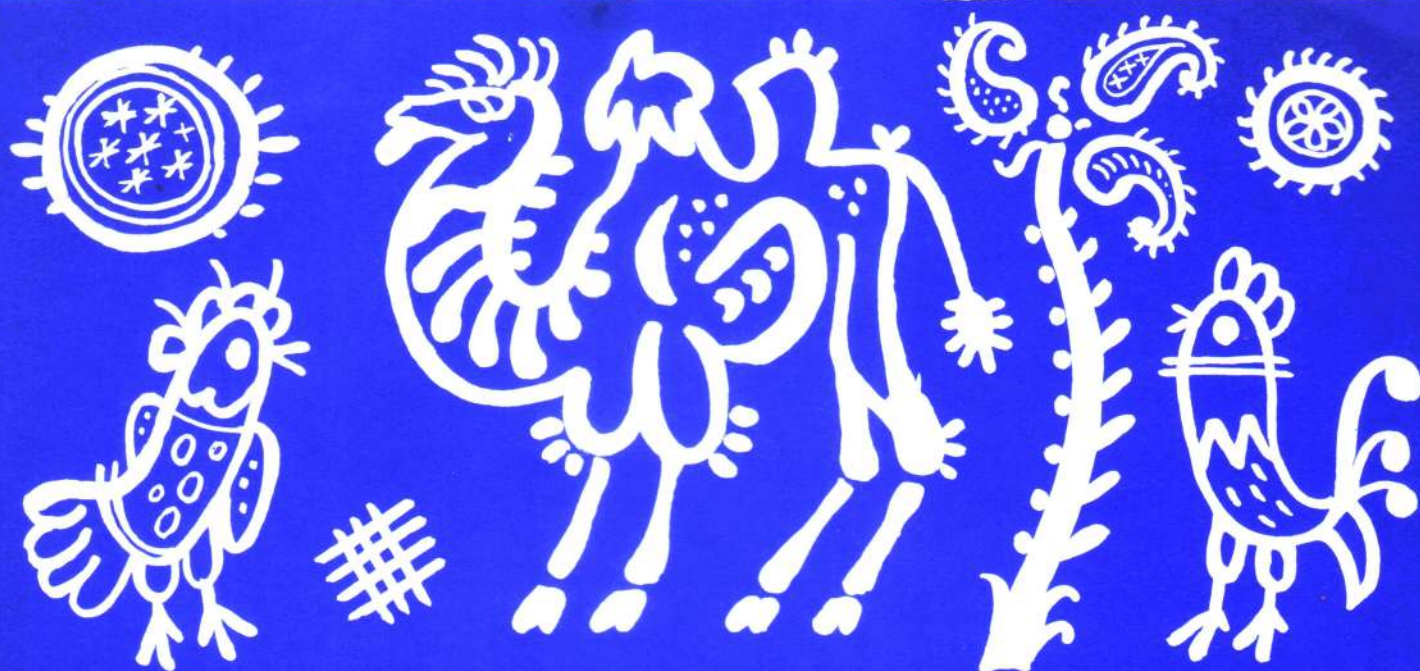
“If not for my neighbour Gocha we’d all be lying in the hot sand now,” Bacho said. Then he introduced Gocha to Big Tigress.

Gocha smiled at her.

Tigress rose, stretched her huge body and turned to her sons, saying, “Never forget that neighbours should always be friends. I don’t ever want to see you scrapping with the neighbours again!”

Bluebrow looked rather embarrassed. He pulled a red balloon from their den and ran off to the panther cubs who were their neighbours. He tried blowing up the balloon on the way, saying to himself, “They’ll feel sad if it’s not blown up when I return it.”





Translated by Fainna Solasko
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О. Иоселиани
СКАЗКА ПРО БАЧО И ГОЧУ
на английском языке

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